

Don't let the holidays go down the drain



Grease can completely block sewer pipe, as shown above.

This holiday season, family and friends will gather to feast on deliciously prepared fried turkey dinners with all the trimmings to complete a meal. But what they may be washing down the kitchen sinks may cause Fort Hood heartburn.

Too often fats, oils, and grease are improperly disposed of by washing the messy, greasy residues down the kitchen sink. "This is a common but costly mistake," Kevin Scholz, Directorate of Public Works Municipal Storm Water Specialist, said. "It is not only an issue for the residences and barracks on post but also dining facilities and child care centers that have kitchens."

Pouring grease down the drain with hot water or using the garbage disposal for getting rid of bulk food scraps is not the right solution either, Scholz said. "That grease becomes a menace to Fort Hood's sewer pipes and the entire sewage collection system."

Scholz likens the dilemma to what happens to your body's own arteries should you eat too many greasy hamburgers. "Just like cholesterol that can block arteries, grease builds up inside sewer lines," Scholz said. "That restricts the flow through those pipes and sometimes causes sewer spills or backups."

These spills can occur anywhere including backyards, public spaces or even inside buildings, Scholz said.

What many people fail to realize is that garbage disposals are not a black hole for making food disappear. "Garbage disposals only break the food into smaller pieces," said Scholz, "releasing even more of the fats and greases that eventually clog up sewer pipes."

Scholz said in addition to clogging pipes, grease can damage other parts of the sewer system. "Lift stations move sewage towards a treatment facility, but grease and other debris can clog or damage pumps," said Scholz. "DPW Maintenance Division personnel spend numerous man-hours and thousands of dollars every year to remove grease from our sewers and repair the damage that it causes."

Grease can cause health hazards, property damage, increase plumbing costs, and threaten the environment. All of this is preventable though. Residents are encouraged to help the community and environment by following these tips:

- Pour grease into an empty container to let it cool, then reuse, recycle or properly dispose of the grease.

- Use scrapers and paper towels to remove most of the grease and food from cookware, plates, and utensils prior to washing.
- Dispose of grease and food scraps in the trash as much as possible.
- Do not use under-sink garbage disposals for getting rid of excess grease or food scraps.
- Commercial additives that claim to dissolve grease may pass the grease down the line but cause problems elsewhere, so avoid using them whenever possible.
- Recycle large quantities of used cooking oil liquids (not solid grease) at the DPW Classification Unit on North Ave and 37th Street. Call 288-7627 for details.